
Kara no Kyoukai Volume 02

----1995, April. I met her.

/ Murder Study (Part 1)

/ 1

I decide to take a walk tonight again; it's pretty cool for the end of the summer and it feels like autumn is coming.

"Ojou-sama, please come home early tonight."

Akitaka, my servant, says while I am putting on my shoes at the entrance. How uninteresting. Ignoring his monotonous voice, I head out of the entrance.

Trudging past the garden, I continue through the gate. Once I exit the mansion, there are no streetlights; only darkness surrounds me. A deep darkness without any sound. The date is about to change from August 31 to September 1. The bamboo around the mansion rustles in the light wind, as if to frighten me. A walk in this kind of silence is the only thing I, Shiki, like to do.

As the night gets deeper, so does the darkness. I think I walk through the empty town because I want to be alone. Or is it because I want to think I'm alone? ...Either way, it's a stupid question. It's impossible for me to be alone in this world.

...Walking away from the main street, I enter a small alley.

I will be turning sixteen this year. In school terms, I am a first year in an ordinary private high school. But, no matter where I go for school, I will have to remain at the mansion in the future, thus my education seems almost meaningless. I had decided upon that school simply because it was nearby: a short commute was clearly the most efficient option.

Perhaps that turned out to be a mistake.

...The alley is darker than the main street. Only one streetlight flickers nervously.

Someone's face suddenly pops into my mind and I clench my teeth. I feel restless lately, even during one of these walks. It's because, out of nowhere, I remember *that guy* from time to time.

...Even in high school, my environment didn't change. No matter what grade they were in, people did not come near me. I don't exactly know why - maybe because I tend to wear my heart on a sleeve. I don't like people. I have not been able to like them since I was a child. I even dislike myself because, unfortunately, I am a person too. That's why I cannot be nice to people when they talk to me... It's not that I despised them, but that's what the

people around me thought. The word spread across campus quickly and within a month, nobody tried to communicate with me. I like a quiet environment too, so I had ended up in an ideal situation.

But the ideal was not to last. There was one student in my class that treated me, Ryougi Shiki, as a friend. That guy with a last name like a [French poet](#) was a nuisance to me. A real nuisance indeed.

...I saw a person under a streetlight far away.

---What a strange thing for me, I remembered that guy's smile.

...That person's behavior was suspicious.

---Thinking back on it later, why did I...

...I followed the person for some reason.

---Why did I feel such a surge of violent excitement?

Deep in the back alley, it is another world. The dead end serves more as an enclosed room than a road - this narrow backstreet, engulfed by the walls of buildings, must be an area devoid of sunlight even during the daytime. I half expect to see a homeless guy, living in here in the town's blind spot, but it is not so. Fresh paint coats the surrounding walls, and this small alley is lined with something wet. The rancid smell of trash usually present in here is masked by an ever more overwhelming stench.

The sea of blood roils around me. What appeared to be red paint is in fact human blood; flowing and filling up the alley. The smell is from this red liquid. In the middle of it all is a man's corpse. I can't see his expression. It seems his arms and legs have been cut off and he looks more like a sprinkler spitting up a shower of blood.

This place is not normal. Even the blackness of the night is stained with the redness of blood.

-----Amidst it all, Shiki is smiling. The sleeves of her light blue kimono are tainted red. Kneeling down and touching the blood flowing on the ground, Shiki streaks it across her lips. The blood drips down her lips and her

body trembles in ecstasy. This is the first lipstick that Shiki has ever worn.

/ 2

Summer vacation has ended and the new term has started.

Nothing has really changed in my school life. I guess the only thing that changed is how the students are dressed, as they start to wear thicker clothing as Autumn approaches. As for me, I have never worn anything other than a kimono. Akitaka would bring me cute clothes that a sixteen year old girl might wear, but I never thought about actually wearing them.

Fortunately, this school doesn't have uniforms, so I can stay in my kimono. I actually wanted a long-sleeved kimono, but with one of those I'd have to waste entire PE classes just changing in and out of them. In the end, I made do with a Yukata-like single-piece kimono. I wondered what I should do about the cold during winter time, but I found a solution to that problem yesterday.

...It happened during the breaks in between classes. I was questioned when I was in my seat.

"Aren't you cold, Shiki?"

"I'm not cold right now, but I guess it should start to feel cold soon."

The person in front of me frowns, as if he's figured out I'm planning to be in my kimono during the winter too.

"You're gonna be wearing that thing even during winter?"

"Probably, but I'll be fine because I'll be wearing something over it,"

I said abruptly, trying to bring a halt to the conversation. He walks away, seemingly surprised at the thought of something being worn over a kimono, and I too was caught rather off-guard by this solution that I had spontaneously developed. In the end, I went out to buy a coat. I bought a leather blouse as it seemed to be the warmest. I'll wear it in the wintertime, but it will stay in my closet until then.

I end up eating lunch together with this guy, being invited and all. We're on the rooftop of the main school building, and many other groups of students surround me - A man and woman in a couple; a group just like ours - as I observe them, he talks to me. I make as if to ignore him, but a single word catches my attention.

"...Huh?"

"I said "Murder". It happened on the last day of the summer vacation, in the western part of the shopping district. It's not on the news yet though."

"Murder... that's harsh..."

"Yeah, and the method was sick too. The killer cut off this guy's arms and legs and just left him there. I heard the whole place was such a sea of blood that they had to board off the alley, and that the killer is still on the loose."

"Only the arms and legs? Can a human die from just that?"

"Of course, from loss of blood. In this case, though, I would assume that death from shock occurred first."

He continues to eat while he talks. In contrast to his calm-looking face, he likes to talk about this kind of stuff. I guess one of his relatives is in the police force or something... I bet he isn't in that high of a rank though, since he's leaking confidential matters.

"Oh, sorry Shiki. I guess it doesn't concern you."

"It's not that it concerns me. But Kokuto-kun..."

I complain to the guy questioning me as I close my eyes.

"That's not something we should discuss during meals."
"

"You're right," nods Kokuto.

Geez... Now I don't have any appetite for this tomato sandwich I just bought.

The first summer in high school ended by hearing a

strange rumor like that one. The season slowly moves into autumn. For Ryougi Shiki, the life that seems just a bit different than what it used to be is about to head into the cold winter.

It has been raining since this morning. Accompanied by the sound of the falling rain, I am walking in the hallway. There aren't many students in the school building now that classes are over. Since the "Killer" incident that Kokuto was talking about has been publicized, the school has banned all club activities. According to Akitaka in the car this morning, it's the fourth case this month. The authorities have no idea of the identity or motives of the killer. None of the victims are connected, except for the fact that they were all out late at night. I guess it wouldn't be that big of a deal if it had happened somewhere far away, but it's a different story when it happens in the very town you live in. All the students go home before dark and everyone, including the boys, goes

home together in groups. Since the cops start patrolling at around nine, I haven't been able to take any night walks to my satisfaction.

"Four victims..."

I murmur.

All the four scenes, I have...

"Ryougi-san."

Someone suddenly calls my name. Turning around, I see a guy I have never seen before. He's wearing blue jeans and a white shirt, very plain. He has a calm face too ... He must be an upperclassman.

"Yes? What is it?"

"You don't have to glare at me like that. Are you looking for Kokuto-kun?"

He asks, with an artificially amiable smile accompanying his ridiculous statement.

"I'm about to go home. Kokuto-kun has nothing to do with this."

"Really? You're wrong. You don't understand, that's why you're irritated. You shouldn't take it out on others too much because of that. It's easy to blame things on someone... It grows to be a habit. Hahaha, isn't four times a bit too much though?"

"-----Huh?"

Confused, I take a step back.

His false smile persists. A smile just like my own - how satisfied he looks. And yet...

"I just came here to talk to you. Now that I've done that, I need to go. Bye."

The man walks away. I don't watch him depart, but I hear the sound of his footsteps fading away into the rain. I head to the entrance. Changing shoes and going outside, I am met only by the rain: Akitaka, who is supposed to pick me up, is not here yet. He usually drives me home on rainy days, but I guess he's late today. It's too troublesome to change my shoes again, so I decide to wait by the stairs to the entrance.

The faint rain is clouding the school grounds. My breath mists white in the December cold... I don't know

how long it had been before I noticed, but Kokuto is beside me.

"I have an umbrella."

"I'm fine, I have a ride home. You can go home."

"I'll get going in a bit. I want to stay here until then... Can I?"

I don't answer. He nods and leans against the wall. He's not the type who cares about his clothes getting dirty. I am not in the mood to talk with Kokuto. I'm determined to ignore anything he says, so it would make no difference whether he's here or not.

In the rain, I just wait. It's strangely quiet... only the raindrops fill my ears. Kokuto does not talk. Leaning on the wall, he has his eyes closed. I thought he was asleep, but it seems he's singing in a soft voice. I guess it's a popular song. Later, when I asked Akitaka, I found out it was called "Singing in the Rain".

Kokuto doesn't talk. There's less than one meter between us. Being this close together without a conversation makes me a bit restless. It was surprisingly painful...

How strange, why is this silence so heart wrenching?

I suddenly begin to feel scared... As if, if we stay like this, *he* will appear.

"...Kokuto-kun!"

"Yes!?"

He jolts up from the wall.

"What? Is something wrong?"

I can see myself in his eyes looking back at me. It's probably at this moment that I actually *look* at this person called Kokuto Mikiya for the first time, and not as a passing observation. He has soft facial features which look somewhat childish. He has big, deep black eyes. In a manner befitting his character, he has natural hair... not dyed or gelled. He wears black glasses that even kids would not wear nowadays. His plain clothing is black from top to bottom. I guess that's his style. I just wonder.. . Why is this person always meddling with me?

"Until now..."

Looking down, I try not to meet his eyes.

"Where were you?"

"I was in the student council room before I came here. Since our Senpai is withdrawing from school, we kind of had this small going-away party. He's called Shirazumi Rio, but it sure took me by surprise. He requested to withdraw from school, 'cause he said he found something he wanted to do, and he was a quiet person and all."

Shirazumi Rio... I don't think I've heard that name. But I do know how Kokuto would know a lot of people that would get him into parties like that. He's not only seen as a friend of classmates, but he is also somewhat popular among older girls.

"I invited you too. I told you yesterday but you never showed up at the student council room. I even went to the classroom to look, but you weren't there."

Certainly, he told me something like that yesterday. But I would have only spoiled the party had I gone... and I thought he was just being polite when he asked.

"I'm surprised. You were serious with that invitation?"

"Of course. What were you thinking, Shiki?"

Kokuto gets mad. Not because his promise was broken , but probably because I thought that way. I can only dislike his anger because it's something I have never experienced before.

I grow quiet from that moment on. On a day like today , I have never wanted Akitaka to show up so much. A bit later, the car drives up to me, and I bid goodbye to Kokuto.

The rain finally stops during the night. Shiki puts on the red leather blouse on and goes outside. A dark cloudy sky looms overhead, with only occasional glimpses of moonlight breaking through the cover. The police are busily patrolling the city. It would be a bit troublesome to run into them, so I decide to go to the riverside.

The wet ground reflects the light from the street lamps, glowing like the remains of a slug. I hear a train pass in

the distance. The echoing sound tells me that the viaduct is near, built to let trains past, but not pedestrians.

...I find someone there.

Slowly, Shiki heads to the viaduct.

The train passes by once again. It's probably the last one for today. The sound now is much louder than before and echoes in the surrounding. She covers her ears as if to protect herself from the deepness of the sound. As the train races away, it grows strangely quiet under the viaduct. Without any street lamps and no way for the moonlight to get in, it is pitch black.

That might be why even the red liquid spilled around this riverside looks black. This is the fifth murder scene. The corpse has been arranged to resemble a flower. With the face at the center, the arms and legs are splayed around it like petals... Severed limbs, neck bent upwards at an inhuman angle. It's easy to see that the intention was to create something like a flower...But it's a shame, it still looks more like a manji.

Amid the grass, an artificial flower is cast away. Because of the spilling blood, the flower is red in color.

... Getting used to this...

That's what she thought to herself. Swallowing dryly, she notices she is extremely thirsty. Is it because of the tension or the excitement? The burning in her throat is incredibly hot. This place is filled with death and Shiki's lips curl into a smile. Barely suppressing her ecstasy, she continues to stare at the corpse.

...Feeling that just at this instant, she is alive.

/ 3

It is a custom for the successor to the Ryougi family to have a match with the master using a real sword at the beginning of each month. The head of the Ryougi household many generations ago got tired of inviting many masters from abroad, so he made a dojo in his own house and made many new schools. This has been passed on until today and unfortunately, even a girl like me is required to wield a sword.

After finishing the match against my father, who surpassed me in both skill and strength, I head to my room. The distance between the dojo and the main house building is as far as, for example, a gym would be from a school building. I walk along the wooden floor, which does not creak even once. On the way, Akitaka is waiting for me. Akitaka, who is my servant, should be at least ten years older than me. He is probably waiting to help me change out of my sweaty clothes.

"Good job! Did your father say anything?"

"Same as always. Get lost, Akitaka. I can change by myself. You too, you're not like my personal servant. It's better for you to go to my older brother. In the end, it's the man that's succeeding."

Akitaka smiles at my harsh words.

"No, there can be no other successor than you. Your brother did not inherit your nature."

"What's so good about this nature?"

I leave Akitaka and head back to the building. Locking myself up in my room, I take off my gi. I stare at the mirror... A woman's body is reflected back at me. If I were to put on some make-up, and pull a scary face, I might be able to look like a guy; but there's nothing that can be done about the body. My body, that grows every day, that is sending SHIKI into despair.

"Maybe I should have been born a guy."

I talk aloud to no one. No, there is someone I can talk to. Inside me, another personality called SHIKI. All children of the Ryougi family are prepared two different names with the same pronunciation. The name of the yin,

a name as a man. The name of the yang, a name as a woman. Since I was born female, I was named Shiki, which means "equation" or "form". If I would have been born male, I would have been named SHIKI, which means "to weave". Why do we do this? It's because the Ryougi family produces children with a high probability of having split personalities.

Just like me.

Father said the Ryougi family has the heredity of a transcendent race. He also mentioned that it is a curse. It is indeed a curse. To me, this is not transcendent, but just abnormal. Fortunately, no successor has been of this nature for several generations. The reason is simple... they all ended up in the mental hospital before maturity. It's very dangerous to have two personalities in one body . The boundary between realities becomes vague and there have been many cases of suicide. But despite it all, I grew up without showing any sign of insanity. It's because me and SHIKI ignored each other.

The right to the ownership of the body is completely mine. SHIKI is only a substitute personality, one that I switched to for the match earlier, since his aggressive personality fits the situation more suitably. Come to

think of it, SHIKI and I exist at the same time. This is different from what people know as a "split personality". I am Shiki, but at the same time, I am also SHIKI. It's just that I have the ownership of the body.

Father was happy that he could produce the rightful successor of the Ryougi family in his generation. That's why I'm treated as the successor, disregarding my male brother. That's fine, I take what's given to me. I probably thought I would lead this somewhat distorted normal life forever. I knew I could only lead such a life...

...Yes, even if SHIKI is a killing monster, I am not able to make him disappear. Since I have "SHIKI" in me, I am Shiki just like him.

Murder Study (Part 1) /

1

"Mikiya, is it true that you're going out with Ryougi?"

I almost spew out my coffee milk to Gakuto's words. Spluttering, I look around: Fortunately, the classroom at lunchtime is loud and no one seems to have heard Gakuto's nonsense.

"What do you mean by that, Gakuto?"

Gakuto looks rather amazed when I question him.

"What are you saying? It's a fact known to everyone that Kokuto of class 1-C has a crush on Ryougi. The only ones who don't know are you two."

I frown at those words.

It's been seven months since I first met Shiki. It's already November, right near winter.

...Certainly it's not weird for anyone to start going out after that much time.

"Gakuto, that's just a misunderstanding. We're just friends, and nothing more."

"Really?"

The hopeful judo club member frowns. In contrast to his name, which means "educated person", this guy, who has been my friend since elementary school, is the athletic type. Thanks to our strong relationship, he must have figured out I wasn't lying.

"But you call her by her first name. There's no way that Ryougi would allow a simple classmate to address her like that."

"Hey now. Shiki doesn't like that. She glared at me when I called her Ryougi-san before. People *say* you can kill someone by looking at them, but Shiki definitely has that potential. Anyways, she says she hates people calling her by her last name, so she says it's fine if I just call her "you". But since I didn't like that, I compromised with "Shiki-san". She didn't like that either, so it ended up with just Shiki. That is the boring truth."

Telling Gakuto about what happened in April, he agrees that it was indeed a boring development.

"I see. That sure is an unromantic story."

Gakuto says this disappointedly... What kind of an answer was he hoping for?

"So that thing last week at the school entrance was nothing either? Damn, it was a waste of time coming here. I should have just eaten lunch in my classroom."

"...Hold on. How do you know about that?"

"I told you, you guys are famous. Everyone at the school already knows you and Ryougi were getting shelter from the rain together by the entrance last Saturday. Since it's Ryougi, even small things like that catch everyone's attention."

I sigh and look up. All I can hope for now is that Shiki will never hear about this.

"This is a school to get you ready for college right? I'm starting to wonder if everyone's really studying..."

"According to the teachers, employment rate is good for students who graduate from here."

...I have to question how this school is run.

"But man, why Ryougi? It just doesn't fit you."

I remember being told something like that by my Senpais.

They told me a quiet, gentle girl would suit me. I guess Gakuto thinks along the same lines too.

...I get a bit angry.

"Shiki isn't such a scary girl."

I let my tongue slip...

Gakuto grins... He looks like he knows I didn't mean to say that out loud.

"What do you mean she's just your friend? She's definitely a hard girl. The fact that you don't see that is proof that you're head-over-heels about her."

He must mean hard-headed when he says hard. I know he's right, but I don't want to just give in and nod.

"I already know that."

"Then what's so good about her? Her looks?"

Gakuto is holding nothing back.

Indeed Shiki is beautiful. But with that aside, I am attracted to Shiki. She always seems like she's about to be hurt. In reality, she's firm enough not to get hurt, but she is also more fragile than she looks. That's probably why I can't ignore her. I don't want to see her get hurt.

"It's just something that you don't notice. Even Shiki has her cute points... Let's see, if I think of her as an animal, she's cute enough to be a rabbit."

Suddenly, I regret saying that.

"Don't be stupid. She's definitely in the cat family, and probably the wild ones too. A rabbit is too far off, way too far. Ryougi is more like the type that would die out of loneliness, isn't she?"

Gakuto laughs his ass off.

But I think she's like a rabbit in that she doesn't become attached to people, and in the way she observes others from a distance. Huh... if that's just me, then fine.

"All right. I won't talk to you about girls anymore."

Gakuto quits laughing once I tell him that.

"You might be right. A rabbit suits her well."

"Gakuto, a frank agreement is rather offensive."

"I mean it. I remembered that rabbits were dangerous too. In this world, there are rabbits that chop off your head if you're unlucky."

I stall at the serious voice in which he delivers this statement.

"That's a pretty amazing rabbit."

Gakuto nods.

"Of course, 'cause I'm talking about the world of gaming."

2

I saw an unbelievable thing on the day the exam for the second quarter ended.

There was a letter in my desk. No, that itself wasn't too weird. The problem was the sender and its content. To put it simply, it was from Shiki, asking me out on a date.

It sounded like a threat telling me to take her out somewhere tomorrow. Bewildered, I headed home and waited apprehensively for the next day to come, feeling like a samurai ordered to kill himself the following sunrise.

"Yo, Kokuto."

Shiki greets me as she arrives. She came to our meeting-place, the dog statue in front of the station, with a red leather jacket over her kimono. More than her outfit, I was confused by how she spoke.

"Did ya wait? Sorry man. It took me awhile to shake off Akitaka."

She says this as if it's perfectly natural for her.

She sounds like a guy, not like the Shiki I know. Not being able to answer, I check her figure again. There's nothing different in her looks. She has a graceful, somewhat diminutive body, but her confident stance and composure lend her a certain measure of strength. This unstable contradiction creates an almost marionette-like atmosphere around here. She is a puppet. Made well, but just on the outside.

"What? You angry just 'cause I'm an hour late? You're pretty intolerant, man."

Shiki engages me with her dark eyes. Her beautiful short black hair frames that small face, and big, beautiful eyes. Nevertheless, whilst those deep eyes reflect the outline of Kokuto Mikiya on the surface, it seems that they are focused on something much further away. Perhaps in the distance...

Come to think of it, I was attracted to these eyes since that snowy day when we first met.

"Um... You're Shiki, right?"

"Yeah," Shiki laughs. A strange smile that's more like a grin.

"What else do I look like? We're wasting time like this. Come on, take me somewhere. I'll let you decide, Kokuto."

Saying that, Shiki seizes my arms forcefully and starts to walk.

...She'd said she'd let me decide, but in my confusion I didn't even notice that she was leading the way...

We walked a lot.

Shiki didn't do much shopping, but she would go into various boutiques to look around, heading into another whenever she got bored. My requests to take a rest at the cafe or a movie theater were denied, but she was in the right. It would have been boring to go to such places with the way Shiki was acting at the moment.

Shiki talked a lot. If I'm not mistaken, she seemed excited somehow. How should I say this... a mental high?

Most of the stores she went to were fashion-oriented, but I was relieved that they were all for women's clothing. Eventually, Shiki must have become tired from looking through four department stores in four hours, as she told me that she wanted to get something to eat.

We wander around and end up in a fast food joint. Shiki takes off her jacket once she takes a seat. Her out-of-place kimono garb draws glances from all around, but this fact does not seem to faze her. Steeling my nerves, I ask her about what I've been wondering all this time.

"Shiki, you actually talk like that all the time?"

"In my case. But there's no meaning in how someone talks. Even you can change that."

Shiki eats at her hamburger disinterestedly.

"Well, this kind of thing never happened before. Today's the first day that I came outside. I didn't say anything until now 'cause I had the same opinion as Shiki."

...I don't get it at all.

"Let's see... It's a split personality, to put it simply. I'm *SHIKI* and the normal one is *Shiki*. *SHIKI* is from the word, "woven cloth." But Shiki and I are not different people. The only difference between us is our priorities of things. The hierarchy of our interests is different."

Saying that, she writes on her napkin with her wet hands. Her white finger traces the words "Shiki" and "SHIKI".

"I wanted to talk with you, Kokuto, that's all. Since it's not something Shiki wanted to do, I'm doing it in her place. Do ya understand?"

"Well, kind of."

I answer uneasily, but I actually have felt what SHIKI is talking about. I think something similar to that happened to me before. Before I entered high school, I met Shiki, but she said she didn't remember it. At that time I thought she said that because she hated me, but after hearing this, it makes sense.

No, more than that. After spending all day with her I can tell she is the same Shiki. As Shiki, no, as SHIKI says, she only talks differently, but her actions are the same. They are so similar I'm starting to feel there's nothing different about her now.

"But why did you tell me about that?"

"I thought I wouldn't be able to hide it from ya much longer."

Shiki takes another drink. She puts the straw to her mouth briefly, and quickly lets go... Shiki doesn't like cold things.

"To be honest, I'm like Shiki's subversive impulse. This was something that she really wanted to do. But up to now, there was no one I wanted to do it with, because Ryougi Shiki was uninterested in everyone."

SHIKI says so like she's not interested. I could not move, being entranced by those deep black eyes.

"Yeah, but you rest assured, I'm still Shiki. I'm just saying what Shiki thinks. Like I told ya, we just talk differently... Well, we're beginning to get out of line, so don't take me too seriously."

"Out of line?... You mean, you and Shiki get into fights?"

"Hey, how can you get in a fight with yourself? No matter what I do, it has to be something we both wanted, so we both have no complaints. No matter how much I

fight, Shiki has control over this body. I'm seeing you like this because Shiki thought it was all right too. Anyway, she'll probably regret having talked this way. It's not something Shiki would do, right?"

I agree.

SHIKI laughs.

"I like those kind of things about you. But Shiki doesn't . That's what I mean by being out of line."

...What does that mean? Does Shiki not like the fact that I don't think too much? Or does Shiki not like the fact that she likes that part of me? I don't know why, but I somehow thought it had to be the latter.

"Well, that's enough explanation for today."

Standing up suddenly, SHIKI puts on the leather jacket.

"Bye~. I like you, so I'll see you again pretty soon."

Putting the money for the hamburger on the table, SHIKI leaves quickly.

I part with SHIKI and return to my neighborhood, the sun is setting already. Because of all the recent murder incidents not many people are out, even though the sun's only setting.

When I get home, my cousin, Daisuke Nii-san is there. I feel exhausted from all that talk with SHIKI, so I go to the kotatsu and put my legs in it. Daisuke Nii-san also has his legs in there so we end up fighting for the small space inside without a word. In the end, I couldn't lay down, so I just had to get up again.

"Aren't you busy, Daisuke-san?"

I ask him while taking a mandarin orange off the table. Daisuke Nii-san answers:

"Yeah. It's five people in three months, of course we're busy. I'm so busy I can't even go home to sleep. I have to get going again in about an hour."

Daisuke Nii-san is a police officer. It's an unfitting job for such a lazy person.

"How's the investigation going?"

"It's all right. There weren't any clues until now but the killer finally left us something. Well, it does seem intentional though."

Saying that, Daisuke Nii-san lifts up his face. His serious face is right in front of mine.

"What I'm telling you is confidential. I'm going to tell you because this is something that's important to you. I told you about the first victim, right?"

Daisuke Nii-san begins to describe the second and the third murder scene... I listen closely while hoping not all policemen in this world let out confidential matters so easily.

The second victim had their body bisected vertically. From their head down to their groin. The weapon used is unknown. One of the cut halves was stuck to the wall.

The third victim had their arms and legs amputated, with the severed arms sewn onto the legs.

The fourth victim had their body cut into pieces and had some word-like symbol stamped on it.

The fifth victim was made to resemble a manji using its arms and legs.

"It's easy to understand that the killer is abnormal."

I say this while trying to hold back the rapidly rising wave of nausea. Daisuke Nii-san agrees.

"I think it's clearly intentional when it's so easy to understand, but what do you think?"

"...Let's see. I don't think it matters that every one of them is killed by being cut apart. I can't say anything else, but..."

"But?"

"I just think the killer is getting used to this. The next one might not be outside."

"You're right." Daisuke Nii-san covers his face with his hands.

"There's no motive and there's no pattern. It's only happening outside right now but, this is a kind of a guy that would even come indoors. If this killer can't find anyone out at night, there's more motive for them to go into someone's house. I just wish the higher ranking guys would take that into consideration and be prepared for it."

"Well..." Daisuke Nii-san changes the subject.

"We found this by the fifth victim."

Daisuke Nii-san places our school badge on the table. It's considered unimportant, seeing as we don't have uniforms or anything, but we are in fact required to wear this somewhere on our person when going to school.

"I don't know if the killer didn't notice this because the scene of the crime was a grassy field or if the killer intentionally put this there. But either way, there has to be a meaning behind this. I might go over to your place sometime soon."

Frowning, he delivers this ominous statement.

3

The winter vacation ended in a flash. The only thing that happened was I went to the shrine on new year with Shiki. But I think I led a normal life other than that.

When the third term started, Shiki isolated herself even more. She radiated an aura of rejection that even I could feel.

After making sure everyone else has left and going to the classroom, I always find SHIKI there. She doesn't do anything, she just stares out of the window. I haven't been invited or called to come here. But I just can't leave this fragile girl alone, so I keep her company meaninglessly.

The sun sets early in the wintertime and the classroom is tinted red. In this red and black, SHIKI is leaning against the window.

"Did I tell you that I hate people?"

Today, SHIKI starts to talk mindlessly.

"That's the first time I heard that... do you mean that?"

"Yeah, Shiki hates people. She's been like that since she was small. ... You see, when you're a child, you don't know anything. You think the whole world will love you unconditionally. Since you like them, they must like you.. . That feels like common sense."

"You're right. You never doubt anything when you're small. You unconditionally love them and you think it's only natural for them to love you back. The only things I was scared of were ghosts. Though, I'm scared of people now."

SHIKI nods in agreement.

"But that's a very important thing. You need to be pure , Kokuto. Since you only worry about yourself when you're small, you won't notice the evil minds of other people. Even if it's just a misunderstanding, the feeling of love you receive makes you able to be kind to others, hence people can only express the emotions they're familiar with."

The sunset casts a red hue across her face. At this moment, I cannot tell if she is SHIKI or Shiki, yet it does not make any difference either way, this is just *Shiki's* monologue.

"But I'm different. I have known someone else since I was born. Since Shiki has SHIKI inside of her, she knew of others. She found out that there're other people who think differently and that they do not love you unconditionally. Since she found out as a child how ugly other people are, she could not love them. In time, she grew to pay them no attention. The only emotion Shiki knows is rejection."

... That's why she hates people. SHIKI says so with her eyes... I feel like crying for no reason.

"But wasn't she lonely like that?"

"Why? Shiki has me. It's certainly lonely by yourself but Shiki isn't alone. She was isolated, but she wasn't alone."

SHIKI says so with a resolute face. There's no deceit in that expression, and it seems she really is satisfied with that.

But really...?

Yet really...?

"But Shiki is acting weird recently. She has an abnormality in her called "me", but she wants to deny me. Denying is my domain, and Shiki is supposed to be only able to affirm."

SHIKI laughs asking why that might be. It's a brutal looking smile.

"Kokuto, have you ever wanted to kill someone?"

At that instant, the sun paints her face in vermilion and makes my heart jump.

"Not so far. The most I've ever wanted was to punch someone."

"I see. But I only have that feeling."

Her voice echoes through the classroom.

"....."

Huh?"

"I told you. Humans can only show emotions that they have experienced. I take on the forbidden taboos inside

Shiki. What's low on Shiki's priorities is high on mine. I am content with that and I know that's why I exist. I am the personality that takes on Shiki's suppressed intentions. That's why I've always killed my will. I have been killing the dark side called SHIKI. I have killed myself over and over. See? The only thing I've experienced is killing things."

Then, she walks away from the window. Why... do I suddenly find the person silently walking toward me so terrifying?

"So Kokuto, the definition of *murder* for Shiki is..."

A voice murmuring by my ear...

"... Is to eliminate, in self defense, anything that tries to open her up."

Smiling, SHIKI leaves the classroom. It was an innocent smile that one would give after playing a trick on you...

During lunch break the next day...

When I asked Shiki if she wanted to have lunch with me, she looked really surprised. At this time, she showed me her surprised expression for the first time since I have met her.

"What a strange thing to ask..."

Saying that, Shiki accepts my request. Shiki asks that we go to the rooftop. She is following silently behind me. Her silent stare is stabbing into my back. Maybe she's mad at me... no, she definitely is... Even I know what she meant by those words yesterday. It was her last warning to me not to be involved with her, and that she doesn't know what she might do if I don't comply.

But Shiki does not understand. That's something Shiki has always unconsciously told me, and I have already gotten used to it. When we get to the rooftop, no one is there. I guess being January and all, nobody else wanted to eat in this cold weather.

"It's cold, do you want to eat somewhere else?"

"No, I want to eat here. If you want to go somewhere else, please go ahead."

I tilt my head to Shiki's polite tone. We sit by the wall to avoid the wind. Shiki just sits there without opening her bread. In contrast, I have already finished my second sandwich.

"Why did you talk to me?"

Shiki's murmur is so sudden that I could not catch her words.

"Did you say something, Shiki?"

"I said, why are you so carefree?"

She says so with piercing eyes.

"That's harsh. I've been called excessively honest, but I've never been called carefree."

"I guess everyone was holding back."

Selfishly convinced, Shiki opens her egg sandwich. The stark crunch of the wrapper suited the frosty rooftop

. Shiki sits there silently and nibbles on her sandwich. I have nothing to do as I'm already done. I think a meal needs to be accompanied by a conversation.

"Shiki, you must be a bit mad."

"...A bit?"

She glares at me. I scold myself for not thinking before I spoke.

"I don't understand, but I get irritated when you're around. Why you involve yourself with me, why you don't act differently after being told all that yesterday, these are all things I don't understand."

"I don't know the reason either. It's fun being with you, but if you ask me why it's fun, I can't answer. Well, if you talk about yesterday, I guess you can say I'm optimistic."

"Kokuto-kun, do you understand that I'm abnormal?"

I can only nod to those words. Her split personality is real and it is indeed not normal.

"Yeah, it's indeed not normal."

"Right. So then you should understand that I am not someone you could associate with normally."

"Abnormal or not, it doesn't matter when we're hanging out."

Shiki stops all movement. She stops time as if she's even forgotten how to breathe.

"But I cannot be like you."

Saying that, Shiki slides her fingers through her hair. Her kimono sways and I notice the bandage wrapped around her thin arm, near her right elbow. The fabric looks clean and new.

"Shiki, that wound..."

Before I get a chance to finish, Shiki stands up.

"If you don't understand with SHIKI's words, I'll tell you myself."

Shiki talks while gazing away into the distance.

"If we keep this up, I will probably end up killing you."
"

... How could I have replied to those words?

After that, Shiki returns to the classroom, leaving her trash behind. On my own again, I begin to pick up the litter.

"...Geez, this is just like Gakuto said."

I remember the conversation I had with Gakuto. Like he told me, I might be stupid. I could not hate Shiki even after she completely rejected me. Rather, my mind has been cleared. There can only be one reason why it's fun being with Shiki.

"I already went mad a long time ago."

...Yeah, why didn't I notice this earlier?

...I love Shiki so much that I can even laugh off her telling me she wants to kill me.

4

It's the first Sunday in February. I wake up and go to the dining room. Daisuke Nii-san is there, getting ready to leave.

"Oh, you were here?"

"Yo. I just came to sleep 'cause I missed the last train, but I've gotta go to work now. I envy you students, your promises of vacation are always kept."

He looks like he hasn't had enough sleep. I bet he's busy with all the new information on that serial killer.

"You were talking about coming to my school, but what happened to that?"

"It seems we'll have to go there again. To tell you the truth, there was a sixth victim three days ago. I guess this victim struggled hard and we found evidence of the killer's skin in her nails. Women have long nails so I guess she scratched the killer's arm pretty bad. Maybe it was a desperate move but the scratch has to be deep; she clawed out almost three centimeters of skin."

This development is a new one, it's not even on TV or in the newspapers yet. But I am shocked for a different reason... I think it's because in the past few days, Shiki has been using the ominous word "killing" quite a number of times. Why else would I imagine for an instant that Shiki would be this killer?

"A scratch... you mean the killer has a wound?"

"Of course. Do you think the victim would scratch her own arm? We've already figured out the skin is from around the elbow area, and the blood's been analyzed, so the killer is done for."

Daisuke Nii-san leaves. With power escaping my legs, I crumble onto the chair. Three days ago was the day I had that conversation with SHIKI in the setting sun. I think when I saw her the next day, the bandage was around her elbow...

Right around mid-day, I figure out it's no good just sitting here and thinking. Instead, I should just go to Shiki and ask her. If she tells me her wound is nothing related to it, this uneasiness will go away.

I decide to visit Shiki's house using the school's contact guide. Her house is on the outskirts of town, one station away from here. When I finally find her house, the sun is already setting. The mansion with bamboo trees surrounding it is oriental-styled. It's impossible to tell the size of this place from where I am - I wouldn't be able to tell exactly how big it is unless I got in a plane to have an overhead view. I walk through the bamboo woods along

a path and reach a big gate: I'm slightly relieved that this ancient-looking place has an intercom. After pushing it and declaring my intentions, a man in a black suit appears. I find out that this man, in around his thirties, is Shiki's servant. This person called Akitaka talks politely, even to a stranger such as myself. Unfortunately, Shiki isn't home. He offers for me to stay and wait, but I refuse. To be honest, I don't have the guts to go into this place alone.

I decide to go home since the sun has already set. I get to the station after an hour's walk and happen to run into Senpai. At his invitation, we eat at a nearby restaurant and end up talking until ten. Unlike Senpai, I am a student so I have to start heading home soon: I say goodbye to Senpai and buy a train ticket at the station. It's almost eleven o'clock now. For a second I wonder if Shiki has arrived home already.

"What the hell am I doing?"

I question myself as I walk through the residential district, which appears absent of any sign of life this late at night. I can't understand why I'm heading toward Shiki's house in this unfamiliar town. Even though I know I won't be able to see her, I at least want to see the

lights in her house. Trudging through the chilly winter air, I exit the residential district and end up facing a group of trees. I walk through the small road in the middle of it. Since there's no wind, the bamboo is silent. There are no streetlights, so the moon is my only guide.

I half-jokingly think what would happen if I got attacked here, and the thought begins to eat at me. The image grows stronger in my head even as my consciousness struggles to discard the thought. When I was a kid, I was scared of ghosts. The shadows in between the bamboo looked like ghosts and I would be frightened. But now, I'm scared of other people. I'm only scared of the fact that someone might be hiding in the bushes.

...Since when did the unknown ghosts turn into other humans?

The more I try to calm down, the more the feeling creeps into me. ...Really, this dreadful feeling does not go away. Oh yeah, I think Shiki was saying the same thing before. I think that was... While I try to recall, I see something ahead of me.

"....."

I stop dead in my tracks. It's not my will, because right now... my mind is totally empty.

A white figure stands a few meters ahead. The white kimono that looks bright is covered with red spots. The red spots on the kimono expand. It's because the thing in front of her is spilling red liquid everywhere. The one in the white kimono is Shiki and the *thing* is not a fountain, but a dead person.

"....."

I cannot say anything. But I always thought about this somewhere in my mind, this image of Shiki standing in front of a dead body. That's why I'm not surprised or making a commotion. My mind is just completely blank. The body must have recently died... the blood would not be flowing out with such a force unless its arteries were slashed while it was alive. There is a gaping wound in its neck and an angled cut transecting its torso. Shiki is silently staring at the dead body. The color of the spilled blood alone is enough to make one faint, yet its organs spill and bulge grotesquely out from the wound, transforming it into something inhuman. It appears as if some slimy, primitive being is trying to assume a human form, but the resemblance is so horrific that it's difficult

to look at... A normal human being would not be able to stand the sight, but Shiki is staring at the dead body. Blood splatters her ghostly-white kimono.

The spots look like red butterflies.

The butterflies are flying toward Shiki's face.

The blood-covered face is twisted and deformed.

Is it because of fear or pleasure?

Is she Shiki... or SHIKI?

"....."

I try to say something and I collapse onto the ground. I vomit. I vomit out everything in my stomach, stomach acid, as if to try and rid myself of this memory... I vomit until I start to cry. But it's no good. It doesn't even make me feel better. The amount of blood is so vast and the smell so overwhelming that it seeps into my brain.

Eventually, Shiki notices me. Her head turns to look at me. The expressionless face shows a smile. It's so pure it makes me rather calm. The smile reminds me of a mother. That smile is so unfitting to this whole scene that...

It makes me shiver.

My consciousness begins to fade as she draws closer. I remember Shiki's words at the last moment.

..."Be careful Kokuto-kun. A bad premonition tends to attract bad reality."

... I guess I was stupid indeed. Because I tried not to think about this evil reality until the moment I saw it with my own eyes...

5

I end up missing school the following day. I was found by a policeman, standing absent-mindedly at the scene of the crime, and was taken in for questioning.

I heard I could not say anything for a few hours. It took me about four hours before my mind returned... I guess my brain doesn't have that good of a recovery system. Anyways, after I was questioned and released, it was too late to go to school.

The manner in which the man was killed would have made it impossible for the killer not to have blood on

their clothes: fortunately, I did not; and being a relative of Daisuke Nii-san, I think my questioning went rather smoothly. Daisuke Nii-san offered me a ride home, which I accepted.

"So you didn't see anyone, Mikiya?"

"You're being too persistent. I said I didn't see anyone."

I glare at Daisuke Nii-san and sit deep in my seat.

"I see. Damn! It would have helped if you'd seen the killer... but I guess he wouldn't have let you go alive if you saw him. I can't let you die, so I guess it's a good thing for me you didn't see anyone."

"You're not a good policeman, Daisuke-san."

I hate myself for being able to respond to him in such a normal tone. My mind scornfully brands me a liar. I can't believe that I can lie with such a straight face, especially considering these are police matters we're talking about here. If I don't tell the truth, things will only get worse... But still, I do not say anything about Shiki being at the scene of the crime.

"Well, I'm glad you're not hurt. So, what's your impression of your first dead body?"

He asks me a cruel question.

"Terrible. I don't ever want to see it again."

"This one is special. It's not as bad as what is normally seen so relax."

What does he want me to be relaxed about?

"But, it's a small world we live in. I didn't know you knew the daughter of the Ryougi family."

The fact that might make him happy gets me more depressed... The murder that happened in front of Ryougi's house is treated as the same killer's work but the investigation stopped from there. Even the police left the territory of the Ryougis after their inspection. From what he says, it's because of the pressure from the Ryougis. It was recorded that this murder happened in between eleven and twelve at night on February third (Sunday), and the only witness was Kokuto Mikiya. But it's also recorded that I was there only after the crime had occurred and that I was in a state of shock after seeing

the scene of the crime. Neither I nor the Ryougi family have said anything about Shiki.

"But didn't you investigate the people of the Ryougi?"

Daisuke-san shakes his head to my question.

"The daughter of that place goes to your high school, so I wanted to ask them about it, but they refused. They said they didn't care about what happened outside their house. The way I see it, they are innocent, they have nothing to do with the crime."

"Huh?"

I let it out without thinking. I trust Daisuke Nii-san even if it seems like I don't. It's commonly known in his workplace that this person keeps his hold on his job due to his superior skill; so that's why I thought he might suspect Shiki.

"Why do you think so?"

"Hmm, well... do you think such a beautiful girl would kill someone? You don't, right? I don't think so too. This is an obvious answer for a guy."

...Why did he ever decide to be a policeman? No, more than that, I sigh at how much more carefree he is than me

.

"I see. You'll be single for the rest of your life."

"Hey now, I could put you in jail, you know."

I'd be released due to lack of any convicting evidence... But I agree with his opinion. Even though I don't have the hunch like he does, it is my opinion that Shiki is not the killer. Even if she admits it herself, I believe she is not the one. So now, there is something I must do.

The crime neared its solution.

From then on, until that day three years later, the killer would cease to appear. For me at that time, that incident seemed like it did not concern me.

It happened to be the first and the last incident which involved both Shiki and me.

Murder Study (Part 1) • Finish

/ 4

A murder occurred in front of my house. My memory of the night after I went to take a walk is vague. But if you connect the parts that I remember, what I must have done is obvious. SHIKI is the same way too, but I do not deal with blood too well. Just looking at it makes my mind go blank. The flowing blood of this victim was really beautiful. The stone road to my mansion, the space between the stones are like a maze and the red liquid navigating that labyrinth was filled with a beauty I had never encountered before.

But that caused the misfortune. When I regained my senses, someone was throwing up behind me. It was Kokuto Mikiya. I didn't know why he was there and, at that time, I didn't even wonder why he was there. After that, I think... I went back to the mansion, but it seems the crime was found out much later than that and nobody knew I was at the scene of the crime. Then, was what I saw just a dream? There's no way that my honest classmate would not say anything about the killer. But why did it have to be in front of my house?

"SHIKI, is it you?"

I ask aloud, but there's no answer. SHIKI and I are out of sync. That feeling grows stronger every day. Even if I let SHIKI use my body, the one who decides is me, but why is it that my memory is vague when I do so?

... Maybe I just don't realize it, but I might be insane like everyone else of the Ryougi bloodline. SHIKI would say: "If you think you're abnormal, then you're not." For an abnormal person, everyone else seems abnormal, so they would not question themselves. At least that's the way I was. Then that must mean I finally figured out the difference between me and the rest of the world after sixteen years. But who caused that?

"Please excuse me, Ojou-sama."

Akitaka says after knocking on the door.

"What is it?"

Akitaka opens the door with my permission. It's almost bedtime, so he does not enter the room.

"It seems there's someone checking out the mansion."

"I heard from father that he got all the policemen out."

Akitaka nods.

"All the police have been off the property since last night. I think it is someone else tonight."

"Do as you wish. It has nothing to do with me."

"It seems the one outside is your friend from your school."

After hearing that, I immediately get up from my bed. I go to the window facing the mansion's gate and look outside. In the bamboo woods, there is a figure that I wish would hide more cleverly. ... It pisses me off.

"I can get him to go home if you wish."

"You can let it be."

I quickly make my way to the bed and lay down. Akitaka leaves after wishing me goodnight. I cannot sleep even after turning off the lights and closing my eyes. There's nothing to do so I check outside the window again. Wearing a brown coat, Mikiya is shivering in the cold. It seems he's looking at the gate. He has a pot of coffee by his feet. What a great guy.

I have to reject the idea that seeing Mikiya at that place is only a dream. Since he was actually there, he's here right now to check on me. I don't know what his motives are, but I think he's probably out to check who the killer is... Anyway, I get mad and unconsciously bite at my nail

.

The day after such this incident, Mikiya was acting normally.

"Shiki, wanna eat lunch together?"

He would say that and go to the rooftop. I feel like I'm being trained using food as I always accept his offer of lunch. I would have decided to ignore him, but I was curious about what he thought of that night. I followed him up to the rooftop thinking he would question me about it, but Mikiya was the same as always.

"Isn't your house too big? I can brag about seeing a servant just by going to see you."

Mikiya has no right to use the word "servant".

"Akitaka is my father's secretary. And we call them caretakers, not servants, Kokuto-kun."

"I see, so you do have people like that at your place."

... That's the only time my house comes up in the conversation. With his personality, I don't think he realizes that we saw him checking out the mansion; but still, he is acting too strangely. He must have seen me covered in blood that night, so why can he still laugh like it never happened? I bring the topic up myself.

"Kokutoh-kun, on the night of February third..."

"Don't talk about that."

He avoids my question just like that.

"What is it, Kokuto?"

... I can't believe it, I'm talking like SHIKI without noticing. Mikiya is a bit startled at being addressed so, while I am obviously still Shiki.

"Tell me, why didn't you tell the police about me?"

"...Because I didn't see anything."

That's a lie. There's no way. At that time, SHIKI went towards him and...

"You just happened to be there, right? At least, that's what I saw, so I decided to believe in you."

That's a lie. Otherwise, why would he be checking on the mansion?

...SHIKI went towards him and...

"Well, to be honest, it's a bit difficult for me to think about it right now. If I can have confidence in myself, I should be able to hear you out; so let's not talk about that for now."

His expression makes me feel like running away.

...SHIKI definitely tried to kill Kokuto Mikiya...

I did not want such a thing. Mikiya said he would believe me. If I could also believe in myself, I wouldn't feel this unknown pain either...

From that day on, I decide to ignore Mikiya completely. About two days into it, he stopped talking to me, but he doesn't stop coming to the mansion to check on me. Under the cold winter sky, he would stay in the bamboo woods until about three in the morning. As a result, I'm no longer able to take my nightly walks. It's been about two weeks since it started. I gaze outside the window, wondering if he really wants to figure out the identity of the killer that badly.

He is really persistent.

It's almost three in the morning, but he just keeps staring at the gate. There's no sign of desperation in his expression - in fact, he seems to be smiling as he leaves.

"....."

I get irritated. I finally understand. He isn't out to find the killer. For him, it's only natural to trust me, and that's why he doesn't suspect me. He's there knowing from the beginning that I would not go out during the night. He's only there to prove my innocence. That's why he smiles

happily when the night ends without anything happening, believing that the true killer is really innocent

"... What a happy guy."

I murmur to myself. Being with Mikiya calms me down. Being with Mikiya makes me think I'm like him. Being with Mikiya makes me think I could go over to *their* side. But definitely, that bright side of the world is a world I should never be in. A world I cannot exist in, a world without a place for me... He drags me in with his smile...

That's why I am irritated by Mikiya, making me think all that. I have inside me a killer called SHIKI. That boy that lets me know that I am abnormal...

"I am fine by myself. You're getting in my way, Kokuto

."

Shiki does not want to go crazy.

SHIKI does not want to be broken.

Everything would have been fine if I had never had the dream of living normally.

March comes and the cold starts to ebb away. I look outside from my classroom. The overlooking view from here makes a person like me feel safe. A view that I cannot reach precludes me from having any semblance of *hope*. Mikiya comes as usual into the red-washed classroom. SHIKI likes to talk like this... and I don't dislike it either.

"I never thought you'd invite me. Are you going to stop ignoring me?"

"I wanted to talk because it's impossible to continue that."

Mikiya makes a frowning face. I continue, feeling as if SHIKI's personality is being ever more strongly intermixed with my own.

"You said that I am not the killer."

The sunset is so red and vivid that I cannot see his face

"I'm sorry. I am a killer. Why do you let me go even after seeing that scene?"

Mikiya looks dumbstruck.

"There's nothing to let go, because you never did such a thing."

"Even if I admit it myself?"

Mikiya nods.

"You're the one who told me not to listen to you too seriously. And you're definitely incapable of doing such a thing... ever."

I grow angry at Mikiya for saying something such as this, even though he has no idea of my true situation.

"What do you mean "definitely"?! What about me can you understand?! What about me can you trust?!"

I vent my anger at him. Mikiya makes a troubled face but smiles nevertheless.

"I have no basis for it, but I will continue to believe in you. I like you, so I want to keep on believing in you."

That did it. A pure power... these words erase all else with their purity.

This unassuming phrase to him is happiness for Shiki and the destruction that she could never get away from. I was just shown the world I could never live in by this happy person.

...A world in which you can live with someone else must be a happy world.

...But I do not know such a world.

...But I probably do not know such a world.

If I get to know someone, SHIKI will kill that person because SHIKI's reason for existence is to deny. And since my reason is to affirm, I cannot exist without denial. Since I have never been attracted to anything, I was able to distance myself from this contradiction. Now that I

know, the more I wish for it, the more I know this wish is hopeless. That fact really hurts and I detest it. For the first time, I detest Mikiya from the bottom of my heart.

... Mikiya laughs like it's nothing.

Even though I can never be there.

I cannot stand his existence. I know for sure now.
Mikiya will bring forth my destruction...

"You're stupid."

I tell him from the bottom of my heart.

"Yeah, I get told that a lot."

I exit the classroom. The sunset blazes red behind me.
As I leave, I ask him without turning.

"Are you going to come again tonight?"

"Huh.....?"

He sounds surprised. I guess he didn't know I had noticed his "stake-outs". Mikiya tries to shrug it off but I stop him.

"Answer me."

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I'll go if I feel like it."

I leave the classroom. Gray clouds loom across in the red sky. From the look of the dark, heavy clouds...

I think it will rain tonight.

Night.

The dark clouds start to shower rain upon the earth. The countless droplets pattering against the ground send a clamor against the hazy night, and the cold air belies the typical March weather. Among the wet bamboo leaves, Kokuto Mikiya stares at the Ryougi mansion. The hand holding his umbrella grows red and sore, and he heaves a great sigh - even he doesn't plan on continuing this voyeuristic charade for much longer. It would be great if the killer were to be caught in the time that he was doing this, but Mikiya has decided to quit if nothing happens for another week.

...Standing in the rain sure is tiring. The coldness and the rain hit hard. Mikiya is just barely getting used to all this.

....*Sigh*

Not because of the rain but rather as a result of Shiki's actions today. What can Mikiya get across to her when

she thinks he doesn't trust her? At that time, Shiki seemed really fragile, so much so that Mikiya thought she was crying.

The rain does not stop.

The black puddles on the ground ripple endlessly.

A tremendous splash.

Mikiya turns in the direction of the sound.

A red figure is standing facing him.

A girl in red. Sodden with rain.

Not even holding an umbrella, the girl is drenched as if she has just come out of the ocean. Her black hair clings to her forehead and her eyes look empty.

"...Shiki"

Mikiya quickly runs to her. How long has this girl been out in the rain? The red kimono is sticking to her ice-cold body. Mikiya hands her the umbrella and takes out a towel from his bag.

"Here, wipe yourself with this. What are you doing? Your house is right there."

Mikiya reaches out his hand. She laughs at his defenselessness.

"..... Huh?"

It happens even before he notices. The hand that reached out to her feels something hot, and Mikiya recoils. A warm sensation flows down his arm.

Cut?

On the arm?

Why?

It doesn't move?

The pain is so sharp, it cannot be perceived as normal pain. It hurts so much that his senses begin to go numb. There's no time for Mikiya to think. The girl in red he thought of as "Shiki" moves. Maybe it's because Mikiya has seen something terrible here already, but his mind is not panicking yet. Jumping back calmly, he runs off.

...No, there was no way he could get away.

The instant Mikiya moves, she dashes towards him. Her speed is beast-like. Mikiya hears a slicing sound from around his feet. Red liquid intermixes with the pooled rainwater. Noticing that it is his own blood, Mikiya falls to the floor, face-up.

"Agh..."

He groans as his back slams into the ground. The girl in red straddles Mikiya's body, determination burning in her eyes. She places her knife at Mikiya's throat. Mikiya can do naught but look up at the events unfolding in front of him.

There is only darkness... and *her*.

There's no emotion in those black eyes. She is serious, resolute. The tip of the knife touches Mikiya's throat. Maybe because the rain is pouring down on her, the girl looks like she's crying.

But there's no expression. No emotion.

That blank, crying mask of a face is frightening, and at the same time, pitiful.

"Kokuto, say something."

She'll listen to his last words. In spite of his trembling body, Mikiya looks unwaveringly into Shiki's eyes.

"I... don't want to... die..."

These words are not directed at Shiki, but rather at the rapidly impending *death* itself.

Not at Shiki.

She smiles.

"I want to kill you."

A warm smile.

Kara no Kyokai / Opening

July, 1998.

I safely finish my first job since being employed at Tohko-san's office. It was really more of a secretary's job; all I had done was get a lawyer to approve a stack of contracts for me. I'm discontent with being treated like a beginner, but I know that it's all I really deserve after having dropped out of college.

"Mikiya-kun, isn't today supposed to be the day you go to the hospital?"

"Yes, I'll go after work."

"You can take your leave early, there's nothing to do anyway."

Tohko-san is always a really nice person when she has her glasses on. Today is one of those lucky days and she is cleaning the handle of her magnificent vehicle.

"I'll head off then. I should be back in about two hours."
"

"Bring me back something nice!"

Leaving Tohko-san behind, I leave the office.

Once a week, on Saturday afternoon, I go to visit her. I go visit Ryougi Shiki, the girl that has been unable to speak since that night. I don't know what kind of trouble she was going through or what she tried to do. I don't even know why she tried to kill me, but her smile at the very last moment was enough for me. As Gakuto said, I have been crazy about Shiki for a very long time; a single close call with death isn't going to change that.

Shiki, who's sleeping in the hospital room, has remained unchanged since that night.

I remember that day when Shiki and I were talking in the classroom as the sun set. She asked me what part of her I could believe in. I repeat my answer from back then .

... I have no basis for it, but I will continue to believe in you. I like you, so I want to keep on believing in you...

...What an immature answer. I had said I had no basis, but of course I did. I can declare with confidence that she would never kill anyone, because Shiki herself knows the pain of murder.

She is the victim and the assailant. She knows more than anyone how grievous murder is.

That's why I believe in her. Shiki, who cannot be harmed; and SHIKI, who only knows harm.

She was always so fragile, like she was about to be hurt.

You could not let out your true feelings even once...

The three pieces are in place.

A person with two bodies that floats with reliance on death.

A non-adaptable existence which takes pleasure from being in contact with death.

A person with an awakened origin who turns to its ego by running away to death.

They all intertwine with one another and wait at the spiral of conflict.